

## TURNING TRAGEDY INTO TRIUMPH



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Editor

IN ONTARIO, we've all come to expect that we're reasonably safe—our buildings don't crumble around us, we're not electrocuted when we flip a light switch, and we can drink from a garden hose on a hot day if the mood strikes.

So, when news broke in May 2000 of tainted drinking water making people ill in the tiny town of Walkerton, it was truly shocking. How could a thing like this happen here, in Ontario—one of the safest places in the world to live? But it did, and seven people paid the ultimate price.

Although 10 years have passed, far from being forgotten, this terrible event has only served to ensure better protection of drinking water systems in communities across Ontario, any of which, at the time, could

have fallen victim to a similar tragedy (see "Engineering profession still mulling over lessons of Walkerton," p. 34).

The subsequent report by Justice Dennis O'Connor, who was appointed commissioner of the Walkerton inquiry, generated 120 recommendations, all of which have been implemented. Two new acts, the *Safe Drinking Water Act* and the *Clean Water Act*, have emerged. And engineers now have a far greater role in water treatment, thanks to new legislation that requires owners of drinking water systems to have their reports signed off by an engineer.

All of these measures have led to a complete overhaul of the way drinking water is delivered to citizens, and a 180-degree turnaround in the complacent attitude that prevailed before tragedy struck.

Our second feature focuses on the work of Engineers Without Borders (EWB), a group with which PEO has recently joined forces to mutual benefit (see *Engineering Dimensions*, May/June 2010, p. 28). In "Shifting the system" (p. 40), Allison Langille takes us to Malawi and Ghana, where EWB is working to improve the lives of millions living in poverty by improving their access to sources of clean water, thriving schools and well-stocked medical clinics. Most importantly, EWB is addressing the underlying issues that have plagued these countries in the past and have led to the unequal distribution of wells, understaffed clinics and empty schools.

On a much lighter note, this year's crop of exemplary engineers have been chosen to receive Ontario Professional Engineers Awards (p. 8). The award winners will receive their well-deserved hardware at a gala held in their honour at the International Centre on November 20. For tickets and more information about the gala, visit [www.ospe.on.ca](http://www.ospe.on.ca). Σ

### CHEERS! Cleaner water is on its way



Western Engineering water experts are examining ways to improve the health and safety of our drinking water. New technologies are being developed to recycle wastewater for reuse in a natural process, in a fraction of the time normally required. Researchers are also working with the City of London to reduce lead levels due to lead pipe corrosion.

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